



BRIEFING: APRIL 12, 2016 BOARD MEETING AGENDA ITEM #6

TO: Chairman Richard and Board Members

FROM: Michelle Boehm, Southern California Regional Director

DATE: April 12, 2016

RE: Report on the Bakersfield to Palmdale Supplemental Alternatives Analysis

Purpose

The purpose of this agenda item is to update the Board on work accomplished on the Bakersfield to Palmdale Section since the release of the February 2012 Bakersfield to Palmdale Supplemental Alternatives Analysis (SAA). This work is presented in the 2016 SAA that is included as an attachment to this Board item. The proposed alternatives have been developed and refined based on additional data collection and field studies, as well as outreach to communities, agencies, and stakeholders. This process, and the refinement of the alignments, are documented in the aforementioned 2016 SAA and presented here to inform the Board and public about the process and the current status of activities on the Bakersfield to Palmdale Section.

This is an information item only. Staff work efforts on this section are being presented to the Board for its information, but no Board action is involved at this time.

Background

In 2001, the Authority, in cooperation with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), started a tiered environmental review process for the statewide high-speed rail system. The approved 2005 first-tier California High-Speed Rail Programmatic environmental document described the program alignment, which included a corridor between Bakersfield and Palmdale. The timeline of activities since then includes the following:

- The 2010 Preliminary Alternatives Analyses introduced an initial range of project alternatives based on the 2005 Programmatic document.
- The 2012 SAA report presented a refined range of alternatives for the Bakersfield to Palmdale Section based on new information obtained since the previous study.
- Work since the 2012 SAA to refine the alternatives in response to input from stakeholders, as well as evaluate the degree to which the alternatives meet the Authority's objectives.

- The 2016 SAA included as an attachment to this Board item presents the latest project refinements and alternatives under consideration based on work since 2012.

Discussion

Since the 2012 SAA was published, the Authority has engaged in a comprehensive public discussion and engagement program for the Bakersfield to Palmdale Section. To date, the Authority has held more than 150 meetings, briefings, and conversations to gather, confirm, and understand key community concerns. This information is incorporated into the development of alternatives and will be used during the environmental process. The community engagement since 2012 has included: at-large public meetings; elected official, agency, and stakeholder briefings; group presentations; activity center outreach; and Stakeholder Working Group meetings.

Highlights of the alternative refinements based on community input for the Bakersfield to Palmdale Section since the 2012 SAA are presented in the table below.

Refinements from 2012 to 2016 SAA	
Edison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel within Edison Highway rather than along private properties to the south of Edison Highway • Move further from Edison Middle School and agricultural features <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Preserve school and packing houses ○ Move away from existing fault zone paralleling SR 58 • Match existing grade between Edison Road and Caliente Creek
Tejon Conservancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignments now follow the existing conservation easement boundary rather than bisecting its northeastern corner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shorten length of section ○ Flatten grade ascending the Tehachapis
Tehachapi Mountains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refine design to minimize tunneling and reduce grade • Reduce impacts to new development areas around the City of Tehachapi
Kern County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce impacts to green energy generation and aerospace facilities • Reduce length, cost and travel time • Reduce impacts in unincorporated and disadvantaged communities
Lancaster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel within Sierra Highway/Rail Corridor at grade • Maintain character of Lancaster Boulevard • Improve regional mobility and connectivity (freight, passenger rail, transit, active transportation)

The Alternatives Screening Memorandum (ASM), included as Appendix A to the 2016 SAA, identified those alternatives where environmental constraints or engineering challenges may justify dropping alternatives from further analysis, while retaining those alternatives that avoid and minimize impacts to environmental and community resources. The process also provided comparative information and data highlighting similarities and differences between alternatives by using applicable state and federal standards, environmental impact criteria, design criteria, and construction/operation factors.

The first phase of the ASM process, which refined previous alternatives based on new studies, was focused on subsections. The second phase combined the recommended alternatives from each subsection into complete end-to-end alignments. This created eight alternatives which were evaluated as part of the 2016 SAA.

The SAA identifies four alternatives to continue to advance because of generally improved constructability (fewer tunnel miles and lower capital costs) and lower potential impacts to right-of-way and displacements, potential Section 4(f) resources, cultural resources, and community resources. Alternatives to be advanced for further consideration are shown in Exhibit 1.

The development of the environmental document for the Bakersfield to Palmdale project section will advance based on the information collected and presented in all of the documents described above. Currently, the draft of this document is anticipated for release in early 2017. The release of the draft environmental document will be accompanied by public meetings as well as agency and public comment as required. Throughout this process comments from the public are collected and used, in conjunction with resource agency comments and technical studies, to support the development of the alternatives and ultimately the selection of a preferred alternative.

Next Steps

- Complete technical studies on the range of alternatives presented in 2016 SAA (subject to regulatory agency concurrence) and prepare draft environmental document.
- Engage regulatory agency partners, stakeholders, and the community during the preparation of the technical studies and environmental documentation to support work activities.

Attachments

- *Supplemental Alternatives Analysis Report: Bakersfield to Palmdale (April 2016)*

Exhibit 1: Range of Recommended Alternatives for Environmental Document

